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"Percurro ad Forum"
Ter. Andria.

The renowned City of Gotham has been illuminated during the gloominess of the past winter, when the density of the atmosphere compelled us to take in our wind, by a new constellation of worthies. A firm of mental blacksmiths have wrought with patriotic ardour, for the good of their benighted countrymen, straitened their eccentricities on the anvil of disputation, and directed to a proper point the hallucinations of mankind. All this they have done cheap and in the newest style imaginable.

It is our present object without party:

cular reference, so peculiarly invidious in a republic, to make a few observations on the nature and general tendency of such institutions; on the tone of feeling & the character of mind, as operated on, in them, who compose the literary firm. For, as to society at large, we believe that they are precisely at that degree of refinement, where they stood, before they were enticed from the temple of Thespis the whirl of assemblies, or their own fire sides to listen to the lucubrations of our orators. Perhaps in the unadjusted collision of opinion their intellects may have been addled - the pendulum of scepticism has been set in motion and is yet swinging at random in their brains, without any head light arising, to settle its vibrations. If any gentleman or lady should find himself or herself, in this disagreeable predicament, they may have the machine of mind wound up gratis, by accompanying us in our next ascent. We will undertake to bear them into a purer atmosphere, to give them a more exalted and extended view of things in general and of themselves in particular. As for the safety of carriage, we cannot promise with as much precision as that score. We have capsized once or twice and occasionally come down to earth with

a considerable degree of velocity - But this we affirm, that we have never known.

To return from this egotistical flight, to the purpose proposed - the excellencies and defects of public disputation. On the former, as critics, we shall make but few remarks. They are sufficiently obvious; that is theoretical excellencies. Reading and research are supposed to be promoted. The operations of mind are intended to be assisted by the acquisition of method in thought and arrangement. A flow of words is by habit obtained; Style is improved by imitation, emulation and practice. We are made accustomed to detect error with quickness; - to unravel the tangled skein of sophistry, to strip bedizzened falsehood of its glare, to be prompt in answer and quick at repartee. Pungency of remark and point in sentiment are more peculiarly studied in addressing a mixed assembly, than the more solid beauties of oratory; - than clear and perspicuous development of truth, classical and chaste diction, close reasoning, or well directed flights of the Imagination. The balanced antitheses of Johnson would be lost; - the wit of Addison impelt and unapplauded. It must be something high sounding & glaring to strike the ear of listeners with admiration.

and if Chesterfield's definition of wit be correct; it were evidently misplaced in such an assemblage:- who pretends to conjugate for the purpose of improving their visible muscles in the art of titillation, the delectable Science of grinning. To speak in the vulgar dialect; if the wit were not of the correct order, the people would never smell out the joke. In fine, Confidence, that soul of oratory, that spirit clad in immortal armour, that mocks at defeat and assumes victory as its undisputable guerdon, is called from the cloud on such occasions to preside at the feast of reason and enjoy the flow of soul.

Such are the theoretical advantages which Institutions like the Forum are supposed to be calculated to produce. Some of them are of the highest importance;- all are excellent in their different spheres. With the malignant satisfaction of critics, when they have pounced upon their victim, we now proceed to point out the well known practical defects, which counterbalance the excellencies just enumerated.

The first injurious effect which we shall mention, is the tendency of public disputation to increase self sufficiency and influate vanity. The evil consequences resulting from such

a state of mind it is entirely unnecessary to dwell upon;- but that such is the result, reason could on first inspection be probable, and experience most lamentably confirms. Far be it from us to identify becoming self confidence, manly firmness in support of right, with the nauseous sickly and sickening airs of the superficial, shallow, litterary fop, who attaches importance to dogmas because they are his own and boasts on his own infallibility is beyond all doctrine, reproof or instruction. But the habit of dispute or even topic, independent of the other moral and intellectual defects which it tends to produce and which we shall presently point out, while it unsettles every other principle, and like some optical instruments scatters in every direction the light of information has one permanent bearing in building up self conceit, and draws all the rays of mind to one grand focus- Vanity. How little the fond partiality of relatives and friends, the unmeaning compliments of idlers, the undiscriminating and in most cases injudicious applause of such heterogeneous assemblies as are most commonly convened on such occasions— how little are these provocatives calculated to quench the flame thus enkindled!

To be more particular:- what is it, which draws from public assemblies, the hum of approbation the thunder of applause? Is it purity of style? No- it is a collection of cant phrases, or antiquated words oddly jumbled together. Is it beauty of sentiment? No- not generally. It would be going perhaps too far, to assert that it is exactly the reverse- deformity. But what appellation of the generic class, shall we give to worn out anecdotes or tattered puns? Is it a recondite, well conducted investigation of the subject-matter, where it admits of learned discussion?- we appeal to fact. It spurns from the penetralia of the temple of Æsculapius left behind him an interesting subject, half dissected under the hands of the Pontifex. Maximus- allured by fame he fled from his peaceful retreat- but alas! he stayed not to take an omen from the bowels of the bleeding victim! He would there have beheld the corruption of general taste, the stagnation of the vital energies of science. A parallel was to be drawn between the influences of his favourite pursuit, and another department of learning, upon the happiness of mankind. He was fired by the theme- he summoned his vocabulary for epithet, his fertile

and lip pocrates for matter - He rushed to the contenteer, denouncing apoplexies & catalepsies fevers and cold sweats, consumptions & dropsies against all the opposers of the healing art - He was immediately thrown into a deliquium when he found that the orators on both sides defended their professions merely to abuse them with severe sarcasm - Not the serious advocate stepped forward on either side. He was much incensed and more warmly instigated, to set right the multitude, to disabuse the deluded populace. He mounted the rostrum - He began with the divine origin of medicine, traced it to the son of Jove -

— Jam nunc quae cupressus
dilecta Semitus Jovi.

Not far had the youth proceeded, when the thunders of the audience arose on his ears, like the troubled waves of the ocean. At first he mistook it for applause - but not another word could be articulate that could be caught by the ear - the boisterous roar continued, - till covered with blushing blushes, he made a reverence of awkward submission, fled from the place forever, and immured himself again in the shades of retirement. Again, are patriotic sentiments, the genuine ebullitions of a free born breast, felt and applau-

ded in such assemblages? Yes - an opponent would triumphantly exclaim. Verily, the fact allowed with its proper restrictions, makes only in favour of the mental vacuity of the public. Odd that Demosthenes thundered, all that Montesquieu demonstrated - the lore of ages, the toil of civilians, the fine spun theories of moralists - all, all were breathed upon their dessert-air - only they come down to the plain and homespun intellects of the mass. True, the very names of Washington, America, Columbia, Fredonia - howsoever they may operate on the pulsations of the heart, do infallibly occasion a concussion of the fore extremities. Heaven forbid that we should slander the fervent glow of patriotism, or the circle which embraces all other revolutions of feeling, the indelible mark which time has engraven in unfading characters upon the soul, and which the destroyer of nature alone can ever efface. We will therefore say no more on the subject - for if it be allowed to be a weakness, the coldest heart must finally acknowledge it, to be an amiable one.

We would not by any means reflect on the

the capacities of our own citizens or our own fair country women, who generally grace in so large a proportion, our public deliberating assemblies. It must be the same in every country. But let the lawyer or the Statesman in embryo, reflect that it is before a far different tribunal that his talents will be tried in the fiery ordeal - let him remember that the bubble reputation aimed by the breath of the million, may float like a cork down the tide of time for a while, and be whelmed in the first eddy that it encounters in its progress - while the sterling fame of erudition and eloquence, rises by slow degrees, like a stately galley, till crowned in the plenitude of her strength and power she rides the element in its wilderness and if she sinks, it is in the bed of immortality.

So much for vanity, a disease which affects the whole intellectual economy and prevent the perfect accomplishment of any great and praiseworthy object, by making us light the necessary means of its attainment, and prescribing in a measure, as a boon of

intuition, the possession of that treasure
found only by the vigils of the midnight oil,
the work and labors of years.

The acquisition of correct and settled opi-
nion, the establishment of long tested, unswer-
ving principles, to direct the energies of man
in the important scenes of his eventful drea-
ma, is undeniably the sine qua non of scien-
the corner stone of her edifice. Of all things
then let the student aspire after a per-
manent fame, shun the hazardous practice
of defending at random, any side, on any
question whatever. Yet do we not find
that the champions at our forensic games
in nine cases out of ten, advocate seriously
the wrong side? Because the argument must
be supported, for the sake of a little quibble
they risk consistency, faith and truth —
From this cause, from want of reflection,
from desire of displaying ingenuity, the
opponent of the clearest, simplest truths,
though he cannot perhaps persuade others
leaves in his own mind in a state of vacilla-
tion, from which it may never be reco-
We said that error was often seriously
advocated. But not even in jest, let

the immaculate form of Truth be attacked. It is without doubt the poorest shaft from the quiver of falsehood, but like the arrow of Philoctetes, it may do no other damage, but leaves a deadly, disgusting and incurable wound in the person of the archer himself. He who can jest with Truth for the sake of a transient éclat, will unfailingly dispense with it entirely to reap a greater advantage.

When we have begun our career with modest expectations and laid the foundation of correct principles, the next all important assistant to be called in to our aid, is method - a personage who assists the muses at their toilet, and without whom they would exhibit a shabby appearance. She holds the frail bark of me may - where else but were lost on an illimitable ocean. The mind like the body rejects its undigested food. But who knows not the value of method? But few indeed have tasted the golden fruit of untiring perseverance in a steady course. But every sigh that the breasts of idleness breathes after honors irrecoverably lost tells us the consequence of wanting method. The mind without it resembles the vine in her first uncultivated state, while

the living principles of action and exertion, roam wildering through its ~~xx~~ one vast solitude. The voice of method is more than the type of discipline, - she tames the rudeness of an untaught conception, she combines them in beauty, harmony & strength. Behold them what oblations at our controversial clubs, are made at the shrine of method! If this be she, the idol of their worship, she is as odd a looking body as ever beheld our eyes on. They have dressed her in Joseph's many coloured coat and subjoined his grandma's red flannel petticoat. Frequent exercises in the art of debating (supposing the subject to be seriously considered) on desultory, unconnected matters, breaks in on the regular routine of study, stops for a while and lastingly impedes the course of memory & thought - and if it adds real information, brings it to bear at the wrong season, and on the wrong point. stud in the course of argument or of apologies for argument, in the frequent replications rejoinders and rebutters of a press is

dispute, method is ever lost sight of, chaos is superinduced—and the eye of the mind roams darkling and lost like the birds of Sicily amid the roar of an earthquake. But this is by far the most favourable side of the picture. Our juvenile disputants are too apt to trust to natural capacity, without any previous investigation, for ideas and arguments to be produced impromptu. Here we may remark an essential difference between the ancients & the moderns. The former held out the idea, that they had devoted much time to the composition of their productions. We all know the anecdote of Euripides and the rule laid down by Horace. The moderns upon the contrary, cherish the opinion, that other things being equal, the shorter the time of labour, the greater the fame of the author. Posterity will explode this chimera by their unbiassed sentence. They will judge of men by the relics they have left behind them and never enquire into the period of mental pregnancy. The quality and not the quantity is that which they will regard. An youth however pursue their career, trusting in vulgar language to Providence. They believe, that intuition has

dered for them what Pythagoras did for his disciples, without their long and tacitum probation. They are inflated with the thought that mental inspiration hangs upon their lips and that they will speak with eloquence because the eloquence comes.

I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came. Men who have adopted this practice find by dear bought experience, the incalculable detriment resulting from their inspired, extemporare harangues, to any methodical arrangement of thought or expression.

We have already noticed the evils resulting from bad example, vicious desire of distinction and illegitimate approbation, on the custom of thought or style. Here it is that the all powerful force of habit is particularly exemplified. The style of the greatest masters, was the work of a life of literary experience. Maturer reflection pruned the luxuriance of youthful intellect. The examples of those who had gone before stood tried and approved by the sanction of time, not as models for servile facsimile, but as tests of sterling worth, as incentives to equal their high reputation. By them they formed their language; - they clad in a chaste and noble

garb the dictates of wisdom and of truth, and immortality was their reward. If the acquisition of a good style is a point so difficult of attainment, it is as difficult to correct or change a bad style, begun in folly and closed in oblivion. A man who has addicted himself to the use of unclassical phrases, vulgar languages and bad grammar withal to listen the effect, will find himself as awkward when he attempts a higher tone, as a person born left-handed when he uses his right-arm.

The collision of well furnished minds is undeniably of radical importance to the interests of the commonwealth of learning. But while we are yet lingering before the threshold of the temple, it becomes us to listen with becoming deference, to the voice of antiquity and of experience. When we have doubts, our skepticism is even more effectually silenced when we can bring our researches into the stores of information, produce our own conviction - when this may not be we must rely on the authority of those who are older than ourselves - But after the years of childhood are past, the erection of the mental pyramid is a solitary an isolated task. The powers of analysis and synthesis we must exercise for ourselves.

the sturdy labourer disdains to call on [illegible] aides.

Again, let us cherish the laudable stimulus to its full extent;- but while so doing, let not [illegible] effort for fame, heaven dazzling and alluring be premature and necessarily imperfect. The mightiest works are the longest in completion the ball flies with greatest velocity, which bursts from the greatest restraint.

Our former remarks were on public speaking let this be remembered throughout. How far personal disputations are consistent with modesty, principle, method & style, is a question of a different nature;- to which we shall only apply at present the golden rule, ne quid nimis- which reminds us of concluding—

S.